

Pan-Africanism in the Age of Obama

As we all know, the presidential candidacy, victory, inauguration, and now administration of Barack Hussein Obama II have electrified the Pan-African world. The reasons for this are both symbolic and substantive, rooted in deep collective anxieties and aspirations, the interwoven memories of racialized subjugation, the enduring yearnings for historical and humanistic redemption from the barbarities and banalities of Euroamerican domination. Obama is the latest torchbearer in the protracted struggles for emancipation and empowerment for African peoples, whose baton was inherited from many others in the Pan-African pantheon from Sojourner Truth to Martin Luther King, Nzinga Mbande to Nelson Mandela.

Pan-Africanism encompassed various political, cultural, and intellectual movements based on a series of shared presumptions and objectives. On the one hand, it sought to liberate Africans and the African diaspora from racial degradation, political oppression, and economic exploitation, and on the other to promote unity and solidarity among African peoples in political, cultural, and economic matters. Needless to say, Pan-Africanism incorporated ideas derived from the experiences of and struggles against slavery, colonialism and racism, as well the ideas of democracy, Marxism and socialism, and nationalism from various parts of the imperial and colonized worlds. In due course, at least six versions or imaginaries of Pan-Africanism developed: Transatlantic, Black Atlantic, continental, sub-Saharan, Pan-Arab, and global.

Proponents of the first imagined a Pan-African world linking continental Africa and its diaspora in the Americas. The second version confined itself to the African diasporic communities in the Americas and Europe, excluding continental Africa, as articulated in Paul Gilroy's book *The Black Atlantic*, in which the cultural creativity and connections of the African diaspora in the United States and Britain are celebrated, while continental Africa is largely ignored. The third focused primarily on the unification of continental Africa. The fourth and fifth restricted themselves to the peoples of the continent north and south of the Sahara, and in the case of Pan-Arabism, extended itself to western Asia or the so-called Middle East. The sixth seeks to reclaim the connections of African peoples dispersed to all corners of the globe.

Each version, as a discourse or a movement, developed at different times and in different ways. For example, while transatlantic Pan-Africanism developed as a movement of ideas, with little formal organization apart from periodic conferences, and predated indeed spawned continental Pan-Africanism, it was the latter which first found institutional fulfilment with the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. The connections and reverberations between these Pan-Africanisms were, and continue to be, intricate, complex, and contradictory, spawning both narrow territorial nationalisms and broad transnational movements, including dozens of regional integration schemes. Pan-African movements were often complimented and constrained by other transnational movements, those organized around religion, for example, or colonial linguistic affiliations.

The age of Obama, I would like to argue, holds the potential of refocusing Pan-Africanism, bringing together many of its strands and tendencies into a new postcolonial

Pan-Africanism fit for the twenty-first century. Obama's rise signifies a Pan-African present in which the continent and the Diaspora are mutually inscribed, that invokes memories of the past and imaginations of the future that are singular and inseparable. Obama was incubated, physically and politically, in the whirlwind of African decolonization and the American civil rights movement. The Obama phenomenon reveals the potential of not only contemporary trans-Atlantic Pan-Africanism borne out of struggles for civil rights in America and independence in Africa, but of forging a new global Pan-Africanism as borne by his electric appeal among African diasporas in Europe and Asia and the interest of the African Union to forge a new compact between the continent and its diasporas globally. The AU has designated the diaspora as Africa's sixth region and allocated it representation in the Economic and Social Council.

Obama's multiple racial, religious, cultural, spatial, and social affiliations make him the quintessential subject and sign, signifier and signified of a 21st century transnational African consciousness and solidarity. This explains his transcendental appeal among peoples of African descent from Kenya to Kansas, Brazil to Britain, Iraq to India. He symbolizes their longings to overcome the color line of the 20th century, so memorably lamented by Dubois, with universal enfranchisement entailed by the transformations of global power in the 21st century.

The Obama phenomenon forces us to examine the engagements between Africa and its Diasporas more seriously than we have tended to. Homelands and diasporas often serve as signifiers for each other, and this is increasingly the case for Africa as a whole and individual African nations. This is what I would like to address in this presentation, the meanings and implications of the Obama phenomenon for Pan-Africanism, for the Pan-African world, for the engagements between Africa and its Diasporas including the overlapping Diasporas in the United States.

It draws its appeal from the fact that Obama is the first person of African descent to become President of the world's wealthiest and most powerful country. His stunning victory can partly be attributed to the disastrous Bush presidency, one of the worst in American history, which left most Americans deeply despondent at home and widely distrusted, if not despised, abroad. The self-assurance of this nation of overconsumption was sapped by the unending and horrendously costly wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the economic meltdown on Wall Street that plunged the country into its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, and the political culture of bitter partisanship, opportunism, and callousness. If during the Democratic Party primaries many recoiled from the unproductive politics of triangulation, from a Clinton coronation, a dynastic restoration of a Billary presidency, by the time of the national elections the Republican currency for economic competence, national security, and moral values was so severely devalued that Senator McCain's erratic behavior and bad judgment knocked the last leg of the party's hegemony—race—which had formed the bedrock of the Republicans' Southern strategy.

Thus, in the 2008 elections, the chickens of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism hatched during the Reagan revolution, which survived the Clinton Administration, finally came home to roost, and left many Americans yearning for new beginnings, for a different future. Obama's candidacy tapped into this deep emotional and existential need for change, for hope, for escape from a mean, divisive era, aggravated by post-9/11 fears and imperial belligerence. Obama promised respite from destructive domestic and foreign

policies, even transformative possibilities in America's long and flawed experiment with democracy.

But Americans did not simply vote against Obama's opponents, they voted for him, for the redemptive potential of his candidacy, its potential to rescue white America from the guilt of slavery and segregation and African America from the gutter of second class citizenship and limited expectations, to renew the seductive narrative of the American dream, restore hope to an eternally optimistic people, to rebrand the country's tattered image in the world. Obama possesses that most elusive and valuable of political attributes-charisma-that is often embodied in, and projected onto, a leader in times of national crisis when the population is yearning for civic salvation. His political appeal was in large measure a result of his complex biography, which tapped into the cherished narratives of the American imaginary. As Obama himself states in *The Audacity of Hope*, he serves 'as a blank screen on which people of vastly different political stripes project their own views.' He enjoys the proverbial charm of the stranger wrapped in immigrant, black, biracial, and cosmopolitan identities, the outsider who absorbs difference, the marginal man who draws everyone. He is the African diasporan everyman.

There is the son of a Kenyan father, the Obama of the migrant narrative, deeply etched in the myth of the American dream for non-black Americans. There is the self-declared black man married to a black woman, the Obama of the African American narrative of longstanding oppression, marginalization, and struggle. There is the person born in outlying Hawaii and partly raised in Indonesia with a multicultural family on several continents, the Obama of the transnational narrative that America's cosmopolitan classes aspire to for their unloved nation. Then there is the son of a white woman, the Obama of the biracial narrative for those who dream of a postracial America. Each Obama appeals to different constituencies at home and abroad: Africans and African Americans seeking redress, biracials in search of recognition, whites desperate for redemption, and the rest of the world looking for respite from America's imperial arrogance and violence.

Obama's astonishing electoral successes went beyond charisma, his soaring eloquence, and unflappable temperament, or the varied appeals of his persona; it was also a tribute to the brilliant organization, steely discipline, and strategic astuteness of his campaign. The Obama team skillfully built an electoral juggernaut, a remarkable machinery of hope and audacity that was unprecedented in its innovativeness and reach, combining old-fashioned, grassroots community organizing, political rallies, and digital mobilization from the Internet to cell phones in a seamless web of recruitment, networking and empowerment for campaign volunteers and supporters, voter registration drives, and fund raising. The results were astounding: they out-organized and out-fundraised first the Clinton campaign, then later the McCain campaign as they raked in more than \$600 million from more than 3 million donors.

Driving the Obama phenomenon were other complicated structural forces. I have already referred to the collapse of the Republican coalition and supremacy, thanks to the demise of the dangerous marriage between neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, the lethal consummation of capitalist avarice and imperial hubris. Obama's campaign captured and responded to the fierce urgency of a country in transition and crisis, undergoing important shifts in its racial, generational, gender, and class dynamics. There was the decomposition of America's age-old binary racial system, the white-black

solitudes of American history, with the country's growing racial and ethnic diversity; the rise of post-boomer and post-civil rights generations, including Obama himself, who were impatient with or oblivious to the bitter and unsettled cultural wars of the 1960s; growing familiarity among whites with professional and highly successful blacks in many walks of life; and the development of less racially polarized social spaces and encounters, notwithstanding the persistence of racialized social inequalities and injustices most savagely manifested in the growth of the prison industrial complex.

In short, Obama was a product of the very limited dispensations of the civil rights settlement the Republicans had worked so hard to overturn. His candidacy and victory are simply unimaginable without the struggles of the civil rights movement, and the numerous movements before it going back to slavery. He embodies a moment of new possibilities for American citizenship and democracy. In particular, Obama fired up the imaginations of the youth and won every demographic group except for whites aged 65 and older. This changing generational imaginary was facilitated by the productions and consumptions of popular culture and transformations in domestic and global racial geographies as articulated in the country's demographic shifts and its immersion into new circuits of globalization.

Obama's victory marked a deeply emotional moment for African Americans, the second largest African diaspora population after Brazil, that was inconceivable to their ancestors who endured and struggled against the shackles of slavery and segregation, amazing even to the beneficiaries of civil rights often constrained by the bigotries and excuses of low expectations. His rise was a tribute to generations of struggles, African Americans' unshakeable faith in their humanity, those eternal hopes that they could shift the trajectory of their nation's cruel history. As they watched Obama accept the nomination in Grant Park, Chicago (and I was there!) many teared up including such political and popular icons as the Rev. Jesse Jackson and Oprah Winfrey. And they choked with incredulous joy as the young new President was inaugurated on the steps of the Capitol and moved to his new residence in the White House, both built by their enslaved ancestors. In the words of Donna Brazile, the Democratic strategist: 'This is the day for which so many prayed, so many marched and so many more sacrificed. This is a day of jubilation and celebration. This is the day to rejoice and recommit ourselves to restoring the American dream for us all.'

It is for these struggles and promises that Obama's inauguration was historic. Amidst the euphoria, many understood that it did not mark the end of racism. Warned Martin Luther King III, 'As bright a day as Nov. 4 was in our nation's history, it is important to remember that Barack Obama's election is not a panacea for race relations in this country. The 13th Amendment abolished slavery, yet segregation ran rampant for a hundred years. Blacks were given the right to vote in 1965, but it took 43 years for an African American to rise to the nation's highest office. Though it carries us further down the path toward equality, Barack Obama's election does not render my father's dream realized.' Caution echoed by the Rev. Jackson when he asked what Dr. King would think of Obama as president. 'I can say without reservation that he would be beaming. I am equally confident that he would not let the euphoria of the moment blind us to the unfinished business that lies ahead. And he would spell out those challenges in biblical terms: feed the hungry, clothe the naked and study war no more.... We should celebrate

the election of our new president. And then we should get back to work to complete the unfinished business of making America a more perfect union.’

In Africa, too, there was euphoria from Cape to Cairo that the son of a Kenyan had scaled to the highest office in the world’s sole superpower. For a continent traumatized by the terrors of slavery and colonialism, and the tyrannies of postcolonial misrule, Obama’s audacity of hope resonated deeply. Some harbored great expectations that Africa would finally have a supporter, or at the very least a sympathetic listener in the White House, that as a member of the African diaspora Obama will pursue more enlightened foreign policies towards Africa than his predecessors. But others were more cautious, ambivalent or even skeptical. They wondered what the new president would bring to Africa beyond hope and pride. The limited structural transformations of postcolonial Africa and post-apartheid South Africa served as cautionary tales to the limits of racial substitution in the corridors of power. They pointed out Obama’s America would still be an empire, that as an American politician Obama would pursue American not African interests, and work under conditions that circumscribe his presidency in America’s divided government. And he would be so preoccupied with digging the U.S. out of the appalling mess left by the Bush Administration that he would have little time for Africa.

But even the skeptics celebrated Obama’s rise. They valued the inspiration he generated and understand that in politics symbols matter, that there are intersections between symbols and substance in so far as even symbolic change often emerges out of real struggles. The rise of Obama, just like the demise of colonialism and apartheid, whatever their subsequent limitations, were products of protracted struggles. It is in this sense that Obama is a powerful symbol for the Pan-African world. He is a symbol of black cognitive and cultural capacities for so long dismissed and derided by whites. He serves as the signified and signifier of black citizenship and African globality, who projects a new image of the African arrival and presence in America. As the son of a Kenyan foreign student, not a descendant of the historic diaspora, Obama reconnects the old diaspora to Africa and vice-versa in more immediate, intimate, and innovative ways. His persona and trajectory simultaneously reaffirm and reconfigure Pan-African connections, and shatter the insidious narratives of rupture proclaimed so loudly in Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* and Keith Richburg’s *Out of America*.

As increasingly evident in recent research the connections between Africa and its diasporas—both old and new—have been far deeper and more diverse and more beneficial for African peoples on the continent and in the diaspora certainly for the Atlantic world than used to be generally acknowledged. The engagements have been cultural, ideological, iconographic, economic, demographic, and political in nature. The communication and circulation of cultural practices and paradigms, ideas and ideologies, images and identities between Africa and its Diasporas have constituted an essential part of the modernities, globalization, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism of both Africa and the diaspora.

The flows have intensified with each new wave of demographic movements, and the development of new information and communication technologies. This is certainly true of the economic flows as evident in remittances and investment from the new Diasporas who currently remit \$40-\$150 billion, more than all so-called foreign ‘aid’ to Africa combined. African peoples have been moving across the Atlantic in both

directions for centuries. Since the Second World War, migrations from and within Africa and the diaspora have steadily increased. Obama is part of this new Diaspora in a country—the U.S.—and a region—the Atlantic—of ‘overlapping Diasporas’: Diasporas constituted out of multiple geographies, histories, and voyages, new migrants from Africa, Afro-Latin America, Afro-Europe. Barack Hussein Obama Sr. was among the first group of Kenyan students who came to the United States as part of the airlift program organized by the renowned Kenyan nationalist leader, Tom Mboya, and then Senator John F. Kennedy, which provided scholarships to educate a new generation of professionals to run the postcolonial state. A year before Obama was born there were 35,355 African born residents in the United States and in 2007 1.4 million. In reverse, people from the Diaspora have gone to Africa on temporary sojourns or permanently as traders, students and scholars, political leaders and rebels, religious seers and proselytizers, and tourists.

The political flows have been particularly crucial. As noted earlier, Pan-Africanism was driven by liberatory and solidarity imperatives. The nationalists who led the movements for independence in Africa and the Caribbean and civil rights in the U.S. almost invariably subscribed to some form of Pan-Africanism, to the notion of a shared, collective racial identity, thanks to the overdetermination of race in the colonial and diasporan worlds, their intricate institutional and ideological networks, and the transnational dimensions of their respective struggles. There were connections and reverberations between these movements: the nationalist achievements in Africa and the Caribbean inspired civil rights struggles in the U. S., while American civil rights activists provided crucial support to liberation movements fighting against recalcitrant settler regimes in Southern Africa by applying pressure on the American government and corporations.

Following the attainment of independence in Africa and civil rights in the Diaspora, Pan-Africanism faced serious challenges in terms of its material and moral anchoring as the new leaders turned inward to reap the fruits of their political victories at least for the political class. The rise of Obama to the American presidency might of course represent little more than African America’s equivalent of African decolonization, in which there will be great disappointment. Already, the honeymoon has ended for President Obama among many African and African American radicals and progressives.

But just as decolonization was a product of protracted struggles and opened a new complicated and contradictory terrain of continuing struggle for the enduring dreams of African nationalism—development, democracy, and self-determination—the ascendancy of President Obama is an outcome of protracted struggles and opens a new chapter in the struggles of African Americans for the full rights and privileges of citizenship. In both cases, it shifts the terrain of struggle from the political to the economic. Clearly, besides enlarging the content of political citizenship and human rights, the Pan-Africanism of the 21st century will increasingly be predicated on economic development and empowerment.

Pan-Africanism remains a powerful force in the 21st century both because its objectives are far from achieved and the new challenges facing Africa and the Diaspora require Pan-African responses. The historical imperatives include the continued marginalization of Africa and the Diaspora, and the unfinished business of emancipation and empowerment for both, despite the enormous historical achievements of the independence and civil rights movements. The contemporary imperatives for Pan-

Africanism include the prevailing processes and projects of globalization, the growth of African international migrations and expansion of the new Diasporas, the reconfiguration of identities and solidarities among the historic Diasporas, and the revitalization of African regional integration drives. The catastrophic regime of neo-liberal capitalism, whose crumbling we are currently witnessing that led to the demise of the developmental state in the global South and the welfare state in the global North, wrecked disproportionate havoc on both Africa and the Diaspora.

This is to suggest that progressive Pan-Africanism needs to offer alternative developmental and democratic visions and instrumental capacities to mobilize all forms of capital—financial, social, cultural, and intellectual—for socioeconomic development and empowerment in Africa and the Diaspora. Through Pan-Africanism Africa and the Diaspora can reinforce each other's struggles, help reposition each other, become each other's keepers: African states have a responsibility to raise the costs of marginalizing the Diaspora, while the Diaspora have a responsibility to lower the costs of engagement between Africa and the global North. There can be little doubt that the imperatives for contemporary Pan-Africanism are both old and new, so are the contexts, objectives, and players. Now, the key players include states controlled by Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora in the Caribbean and state actors of African descent at the highest levels of government elsewhere in the global North. In Canada, the Governor-General, the putative head of state, is a Black woman, the Haitian-born, Michaëlle Jean. And the United States now has its President Barack Obama.

An Obama is unthinkable in both contemporary Europe, where Afro-Europeans remain invisible in national histories, and Afro-Latin America, which attracts relatively few contemporary African migrants. Obama's personal and political biographies symbolize the braided histories of the old and new diasporas in the United States, the center of Africa's 'overlapping diasporas', where the historic communities of African Americans, migrant communities from other diasporic locations, recent immigrants from both the indigenous and immigrant communities of Africa live side by side. Afro-Europe is largely constituted by 20th century migrants from the Americas and continental Africa, Afro-Latin America remains the preserve of the migrations of enslavement from Africa and post-emancipation migrations from the Caribbean, while Afro-North America embodies the migrant traditions and trajectories of both. Nonetheless, Obama's rise invigorates all these diasporas and challenges Europe and Latin America to look hard at their own histories and societies. It also expands the meaning of multicultural democracy at a global level as much as it does nationally with regard to the promises of the American constitution and citizenship in the 21st century.

Each diaspora wave or group in the United States tends to have its own connections and commitments to Africa, its own memories and imaginations of Africa, and its own conceptions of the diasporic condition and identity. This partly explains the heated debate about Obama's blackness early in the campaign, which was less about Obama's racial authenticity and more about the preeminence of the African American experience and political loyalty to the civil rights agenda. Also diverse and complex are the relations among these diasporas, which are structured by different contexts, constructs, and characters of engagement. By context, I refer to the social arenas in which the different diasporas interact; by constructs I mean the dynamics that mediate their interactions; and character entails the content and processes of interactions. The contexts

are private, public and the various intersections between them. The connections and disconnections among the different diasporas are conditioned by institutional, ideological, identity, and individual dynamics. As for content of the intra-diasporan engagements, they can be characterized by antagonism, ambivalence, acceptance, adaptation, and assimilation. Most likely, the Obama presidency will affect the dynamics of engagements among Africa's overlapping diasporas in the United States, as between them and Africa, and in other diaspora locations. Obama serves as the pivot around which new diaspora identities and politics will coalesce and evolve.

Let me conclude with a few remarks on the implications of Obama's presidency for African Americans and Africa. Undoubtedly, his rise is a milestone in African America political and cultural history, but it does not portend the arrival of a post-racial promised land any time soon. One electoral victory cannot overturn four centuries of African American racial exploitation and oppression. The real meaning, the hope of his victory lies in the process, the struggles that brought it about. Obama was propelled by a diverse movement comprised of hundreds of thousands of activists fighting for health care, education, jobs, women's rights, gay rights, peace, the environment, and against poverty, militarism, mass incarceration, and other causes to create a more human society. Their dreams, indeed the dreams of the civil rights movement, of Martin Luther King and Ella Baker, remain deferred. For Dr. King, racism, poverty, and war were intertwined, American imperialism abroad and racism at home reproduced each other. President Obama lacks Dr. King's burning moral and political fervor to overhaul American society and politics; his drive is to run the country more efficiently. He also seems wedded to maintaining American power, albeit with softer gloves than the bare knuckled arrogance of the Bush Administration. Clearly, President Obama owes much to the civil rights movement, but he does not consummate it. The battle to advance an alternative conception of American democracy and global power persists. The struggle continues.

Similarly, it is clear that Obama's victory means a lot to Africa, that Kenya and Africa loom large in Obama's biography. One third of his first autobiography, *Dreams of My Father*, is set in Kenya, where his search for identity and recognition was realized; his years at Harvard Law School are shortshrifted in two sentences. Obama first discovered his political voice and oratory as a college student involved the anti-apartheid campaign. Yet, in his second and more political autobiography, *The Audacity of Hope*, Africa peeps in as an embarrassing afterthought. He gives us the conventional pathological Africa of disease, poverty, corruption, dictatorships, and war that plunges him 'into cynicism and despair,' he writes, until he is reminded that charity, western philanthropy, not trade and partnership, can go a long way to help this benighted continent of his father and numerous Kenyan relatives.

Many observers across the continent and the United States wonder whether there will be any significant shifts in American foreign policies towards the continent beyond the traditional paradigm that sees Africa in humanitarian, not geostrategic terms, as a global pawn rather than as a global player, notwithstanding the polite rhetoric about Africa's great potential, or the growing anxieties about China's economic 'invasion' of Africa, and the new found security preoccupations in which Africa is seen as a soft underbelly in the misguided 'war on terror'. During the campaign, the Obama team identified three policy objectives: to accelerate Africa's integration into the global economy; to enhance the peace and security of African states; and to strengthen

relationships with those African governments, institutions and civil society organizations committed to deepening democracy, accountability and reducing poverty. As laudable as these goals might be, the devil is in the details, in the implementation. The rhetoric is compromised by both the weight of history and the inherent contradictions of unequal power, the persistent incongruence of American and African interests, by the politics of the new foreign policy team, who are largely recycled Clintonites.

The first objective would go a long way not simply by increasing development assistance and tinkering with such instruments as the African Growth and Opportunity Act and the Millennium Challenge Account, but by abandoning neoliberalism whose bankruptcy is now self-evident and dismantling or restructuring the institutions—principally the detested trinity of the World Bank, IMF, and the WTO—that promoted market fundamentalism for Africa from the 1980s with such devastating consequences. The second ought to include repudiating the African Command (AFRICOM), which is widely opposed by African states and social activists, and threatens to intensify the militarization of Africa and stoke imperial rivalries between the US, the EU, and China. Also, the U.S. should seek to supplement, rather than supplant, African peacemaking initiatives.

The third agenda flies in the face of America's long and sordid record of coddling autocracies in Africa when it suits its short-term and shortsighted interests. It entails backing rather than bucking progressive regimes, experiments, and struggles committed to the construction of truly democratic developmental states. But US-Africa policy cannot be seen in isolation. I would add a fourth agenda: America's global policies, which obviously affect Africa as an integral part of the world. The U.S. would assist Africa immeasurably if it truly supported the reorganization of institutions of global governance including the UN Security Council, seriously pursued multilateralism, disarmament, the protection of human rights, and the promotion of environmental security. Obama's apparent gentler, kinder imperialism is not good enough for Africa or the world.

The Obama Administration cannot be expected to embark on transformative changes in America's domestic and foreign policies unless it is made to do so. This is not about the good intentions or intelligence of President Obama himself or members of his Administration, but about the difficult and demanding politics of transformative change. It is worth remembering a pertinent historical analogy. Following his victory in 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt met labor leaders with whom he had long worked, who brought him plans they wanted the new President to implement. Roosevelt told them: 'I agree with you, I want to do it, now make me do it.' Progressive forces will have to make Obama do the right thing for Africa and the rest of the Pan-Africa world including for African Americans.

Africa's challenge is, as it has been and will always be with any American administration, or any major power, for its leaders and thinkers to clearly articulate and fight for Africa's fundamental interests articulated around the triple dreams of development, democracy, and self-determination. This entails a three-pronged strategy: strengthening coordination within Africa itself so that the continent speaks with a more unified voice on critical African and global issues; promoting collaboration between Africa and the global South for more leverage in negotiations with the global North over international challenges from trade to security to the environment; and bolstering

connections with the African diasporas as Africa's eyes and ears in the streets and corridors of power in Euroamerica.

Africa and the diaspora need to mobilize each other more vigorously than ever before for their mutual benefit under President Obama. The Obama presidency in itself helps free the relations between the continent and the United States from their predictable historical shackles. Unburdened by the white guilt of his predecessors, and unencumbered by their reflex suspicions of white Euroamerican leaders, President Obama and African leaders might be prepared to speak to each other more openly. By treating Africa as an equal partner rather than a charity case, it will help abate Euroamerica's racist unconscious in which Africa is the irredeemable pathological 'other'. President Obama is already an inspiration to many Africans and any criticisms he might express against dictatorial and corrupt African states will be welcomed by many ordinary people.

But by the same token, they will not hesitate to turn against his Administration if he continues America's bullying, its crass interventions and exploitation of their countries. Their racial pride will quickly evaporate: after all, they are used to being ruled and misruled by black leaders in their own countries. The same goes for African Americans, who seek substantive social uplift rather than symbolic racial representation, concrete changes in their still unequal lives rather than the rhetoric of change by one of their own, even if their protracted struggles paved his way to power. Thus, the recasting of Pan-Africanism under the Obama age will produce new solidarities and schisms, complementarities and contradictions, possibilities and pitfalls between Africa and its diasporas. That should not surprise us, for history is fundamentally messy and unpredictable. Pan-Africanism is no different as it navigates the transformations of the 21st century in which African independence is taken for granted and a President Obama is finally viable in the heartlands of Euroamerican power that has terrorized Africa and its diasporas for the last few centuries. **Thank you!**